Webchat transcript, March 29, 2018

We had a lot of questions at this webchat! For the transcript, we've tried to break them down by topic and/or program.

CITY PLANNING

Q: My first question is about the MCP course setting, as there are other concentration in this major, can I also have courses on other concentrations besides Urban Design, which is what I'm pursuing? Like transportation?

A: Yes, you can take courses in the other concentrations if you'd like.

Q: I have just enrolled in the MCP Program with Smart City concentration. I wanted to know a little more about PennPraxis. Can I have research opportunities within my first year of study?

A: First let me welcome you the program! PennPraxis offers a wide range of research opportunities that are certainly available to 1st semester students. Job postings typically get circulated throughout the department at the start of the school year or as positions arise, but if you see/ hear of a project that's interesting to you, feel free to reach out and see if there's any way you can participate. I myself have worked on several PennPraxis projects in my 2 years here.

Q: I'm enrolled to the MCP class of 2020 under Urban Design concentration. Is it possible for students to take 2 certificate programs and finish them within the normal 2-year timeframe? I am interested to pursue both Urban Design and Real Estate certificates.

A: it is pretty much impossible to pursue two certificates and the MCP in two years. You can double-count some courses but you can't triple count them.

Q: I have a question about where to find requirements such as any reading lists that should be going through prior to the semester. Will professors be sending out them after I accept the offer or I can find them online?

A: The Department will refer you to Planetizen's recommended reading list - https://www.planetizen.com/books/20.

Q: I have been admitted to the MCP program and I have a question about dual degree programs. If I would like to pursue a dual degree with MSHP or Business Admin with Wharton, let's say, should I apply to either programs prior to the start of semester or I am eligible to apply afterwards in my first year?

A: You would apply in the fall of your first year. If you know that you're interested in pursuing a dual degree I would suggest taking meetings with the Preservation department or Wharton as soon as you can. And be aware that the Business Admin application does not go through PennDesign.

Q: Does the MCP program offer deferral on a case-by-case basis? As there's been a policy change with my scholarship which would only allow me to start grad school in 2019. I've also reached out to the department head yet I still to receive any response.

A: Please write to us at admissions@design.upenn.edu and we will follow up on it for you.

Q: I have another question about the desire on doing some research, as I have interests in the area of rain and flood management, and how could the professor help me on this?

A: I would look at the MCP faculty bios and reach out to whoever seems to be the most in line with you interest (I'm sorry that I can't speak to a specific professor right now, I'm in the CED concentration)! They can help you find the best classes for you, and figure out internship options; rain and flood management is a topic that is well represented here.

Q: Does the school help first year MCP students to get internships?

A: the school of design has many connections in the community and across the country regarding internship opportunities. Currently, we receive about two emails a day informing us of opportunities as they are rolling out. There is also a large career fair that the Design School hosts each Spring for students to get exposure to firms and municipal entities. This year there were over 80 firms and organizations that attended. There is also a career services department that can help you draft your resume and cover letter.

Q: Are the MCP electives offered every semester, or are some of those tied to spring or fall semesters? I would like to take the Sending the City elective in my first semester, but I also believe I would make the most of it with better coding skills that I can build along the program.

A: There are a variety of electives that are offered every semester. I cannot say if 'Sending the City' will be offered next fall. That being said, if you have little to no experience coding, you will absolutely have the opportunity to bolster your skills in the first semester. I would recommend that you take quantitative methods your first semester with Eric Guerra. He will help you get your coding skills up to snuff and prepare you well to then take 'Sending the City'.

Q: I have a question regarding to the "Boot Camp" training weeks prior to the start of the semester. I lack specific computer trainings back in my undergraduate studies, does the camp allow me to have a better preparation for the MCP program and also if not, will some of the courses be very challenging?

A: I too was lacking a number of critical computer skills when I entered this program last August. I think that the boot camp series is very helpful, and is at least worth sitting in on. To be honest I found that the R boot camp course, the planning economics courses, and intro to GIS extremely helpful. The intro to the Adobe suite was pretty brief - though helpful if you have never used any of the programs before. Obviously you will learn the most through your courses first semester, but it is a really nice way to jump back in and have time exploring Philly and the Penn campus before school ramps up.

Q: I want to ask about the chance to study outside the campus during MCP. Like professional communication with other students in America.

A: We don't have classes off campus but plenty of MCP students hold jobs and internships outside of PennDesign during their time here. Some hold these positions throughout the school year, but all MCP candidates are required to hold a summer internship after their first year.

Q: One more question, do you know how many first year MCP students start their internships before spring semester?

A: there are a handful of students who attain internships either during their first semester or their second semester of their first year in the program. Many of these students (if not all) have been offered the opportunity to stay on and continue their work over the summer. Some of these opportunities include working for DVRPC, SEPTA and Ottis along with many environmental firms and the facility management department that handles campus sustainability here on campus. Additionally, some professors will also be looking for students to conduct research throughout the year and over the summer if that is of any particular interest. In short, there are a wealth of opportunities if that is something you really want to pursue. That being said, the program is extremely demanding and so most do not work more than 10 hours a week during the academic year.

MUSA
Q: This question is for the MUSA students. I was wondering typically how long it takes to complete the program. 2 or 3 semesters? The website says 9 months but I am not sure how long Penn's semester is.

A: If you plan on being a full-time student, it should take you 2 semesters.

Q: Where can we find details on the courses and course requirements for MUSA? The website provides rough overviews, but it doesn't help for more in-depth planning.

A: I can answer any specific questions you have about courses. Every student selects an urban content area (which must be approved by the program director) to ensure a level of domain expertise informs the programming work we do. My urban content area was in Infrastructure Finance.

Q: What is the number of courses a typical full-time student would take per semester? Is it overloaded? Looks like the requirement is for 10 courses, so meaning 5 courses per semester?

A: 5 is the maximum. I took 5 this semester and last semester. That's more than enough (and it happens to be the maximum number of units you can take). In MUSA, you'll have to do 5 courses in one semester (if you plan to graduate in the two semesters).

Q: What are the core courses and what are the electives? Is smart cities studio part of capstone?

A: There aren't "core" courses but you must choose 5 courses from the MUSA offerings (this is a requirement). The smart cities studio is not part of our capstone. There is a capstone and this year was the first year for the MUSA practicum, which is like a studio. For my project, we've built a crash prediction model for the city of Louisville, KY.

Q: 5 classes for MUSA seems like a lot of classes. How did you combine those classes? Did you have life outside those classes? Like participating in club meetings and such

A: 5 classes is absolutely a lot, but it's doable (I did it/am doing it!) But yes, I have a life outside of my classes (I'm a part of a few clubs and I'm here answering your questions! yay!). But if you're like most MUSA students, much of your time will be spent bonding with classmates, doing work on the first floor of Van Pelt (library). It's practically a rite of passage now

Q: What are the urban content areas? Do we choose them right off the bat in first semester?

A: Urban content areas are like a concentration. They are high-level and student-initiated (but must be approved by the director of the program). The two-courses selected must be complementary and often fall into areas like, transportation, real estate, infrastructure, etc. You don't necessary have to choose them "right off the bat" but you should have an idea and begin discussing it with the director sooner rather than later (because classes corresponding to your interests may be outside PennDesign and fill-up).

Q: I would like to know more about the relationship between each concentration, and their course setting for the whole project

A: There isn't a "relationship" for each urban content area In MUSA. Since our program is highly technical, the "concentration" or urban content area serves the major function of informing our programming/design decisions. You're also in class with people who have different focuses/interests that they are pursuing which also helps you in your technical work.

Q: Does Smart Cities Studio count as a core course with credit then? Or is it something additional?

A: I don't believe so. Studios are the equivalent of two courses and often require pre-requisites (if I'm not mistaken). Moreover, (if I'm not mistaken) these courses are typically offered in the Spring. A student may be able to take the studio, but it will likely take special planning/coordination with the program director. Courses listed as MUSA or cross-listed with MUSA would count as core courses. Any courses beyond this may require special dispensation/consideration.

Q: So we choose 5 out of the 8 listed on the course page on the MUSA website? Also, does smart city studio count as a credit module? Do we have to declare concentration right off the bat in first semester?

A: You will most likely be choosing 5 of the 8 on the website, yes. However, many classes are being added/changed so I'd try to get my hands on this semester's bulletin. The smart cities module would count, but I don't think you would have the time/schedule space to do this (it's essentially two classes in one). And yes, you would "declare" the concentration, but it is not a formal declaration. You'll work with the program director to identify a concentration based on your interests (academic and career)

Q: I have a MUSA question! Does the city help students accessing data for class projects?

A: Most of the data we use is from open data sources around the country and around the world! For special projects, we do receive proprietary data that isn't widely disseminated. If you have specific data in mind, I would discuss this with the director. If you are sure the data exist, then there are methods for requesting the data (though there is no guarantee of securing it).

Q: Do MUSA students have opportunities to apply for research assistant positions as well?

A: Of course you can apply for research/assistant positions! In fact, based on your skills, you might be approached/asked to apply. But I would generally recommend that you don't do that if you're a MUSA student. It's an intense program, and I'd think hard about what you want to get out of it and how an assistant/research position would fit in.

Q: Are there teaching assistantship for first year in addition to scholarships with the MUSA program?

A: There are teaching assistantships that may be applied for in other departments (but I wouldn't recommend it) and none are offered "formally" through MUSA to my knowledge.

Q: That sounds good. Just curious why wouldn't you recommend the TA position in other department? Will it be too much to take on a job and do 5 classes? Do you work on campus? If so how many hours per week?

A: Yeah, I wouldn't recommend it because the program is very intense/time consuming, but also because you'll want to spend time with classmates (since you're only here for a short-time).

Q: How many people are in the MUSA program and what kind of programming knowledge were you expert in before enrolling in the MUSA program?

A: There are about 20 of us, but the smart cities students in planning are in many of our classes. As far as expert knowledge, I knew C++ (but that was a while ago, so I wasn't expert), SQL, STATA, and had experience with a GIS tool

Q: If I've got a background in Python, R and QGIS from my undergrad, will the MUSA course be less challenging then?

A: If you come in with that background, the classes will not be less challenging. The program is scaffolded such that there are always stretch goals for students (and professors love that). Also, you'll be able to have a portfolio that is that much more impressive. The program is imminently flexible in that way.

Q: Regarding laptops: if we are using macs now, do we have to get windows laptops since installation of ArcGIS is required for MUSA?

A: I have a PC and I'd say about half the students have a PC (the other half have macs). You can run parallels (and a few other programs, I think) on a mac and it works fine for my classmates. Professors come in expecting that there will be this dichotomy and most of the time there are directions for both (though I obviously never pay attention to mac stuff haha).

Q: Does the MUSA program permit a student to take classes at Wharton that count towards the requirement?

A: Yeah, you can take classes in Wharton! I've taken two there and I'm in a few clubs over there as well (Wharton Analytics, Wharton Innovation and Design Club).

MFA

Q: I would like to ask how TA-ship work generally in MFA courses. Also, how do we get a chance to teach our own classes? And what is it like?

A: In the MFA program, you can have a ta-ship every semester. There aren't a lot of positions where you teach your own class but there are a few, especially in the summer. Find out more from your Department.

Q: What are the mandatory courses for MFA students? How many classes do students take each semester?

A: The MFA coursework requires eight credit units of Graduate Studio, four credit units of Graduate Critique and seven credit units of electives.

Q: I would love to hear from current MFA students. What were the main reasons for coming to UPenn program? Also what are the advantages of living and making a career as an independent artist in Philly compare to other cities/school?

A: Unfortunately we don't have any MFA students here but you can email them. Their contact information is under Meet Our Students, https://www.design.upenn.edu/graduate-admissions/get-know-us.

MSD-EBD

Q: Does the coursework in MSD-EBD enable applying the theory that we learn, into real-life scenarios during the time of study?

A: Unfortunately we do not have any current EBD students here today, but my understanding is that you would at least apply the theory to real-life scenarios in your EBD studio course in your second and third semesters. I would suggest that you email our EBD student ambassador, Aishu, at aishu@design.upenn.edu. She should be able to better answer your questions.

Q: How long does it averagely taking us to graduate from the EBD program?

A: The MSD-EBD program is three semesters long - fall, spring, fall. You would graduate in December 2019.

Q: Do MBD-EBD students have opportunities for teaching assistantships or research assistant positions?

A: Yes, there are EBD students that at least have Research Assistant positions; not 100% sure about TA opportunities. You should contact the Director of the program, Bill Braham, at brahamw@design.upenn.edu and he can definitely let you know.

MLA

Q: Good evening, I'm curious as to the extent to which I could develop an independent project on a specific place of interest...and whether that is something that could begin as early as a 1st year MLA student. Thanks in advance

A: So as an MLA student you will have a studio every semester which will require you to develop your own project within a specific prompt. If you want to pursue something entirely you own you would want to take an independent study or wait until your third year to develop for Thesis.

Q: Thank you. And from what I understand the specific prompts are situated within geographic locations determined for the whole studio, correct? I have a specific region that I would like to develop an independent study or thesis of but how would you create a distinction between the two? Seems like independent studies can happen earlier than final year?

A: Yes I believe that is the case for studios. Each studio focuses on a region. So for the independent study that is a class separate from studio. It would be up to you to coordinate the location and method of study together with an adviser. Independent studies can take place at any time although it is my understanding that in architecture they typically occur in fall semester (not sure if this is the case for landscape). Thesis is similar to independent study only that thesis does occur in your last year and must be completed satisfactorily to graduate whereas independent study is in addition to everything else. I would suggest if you are very interested in a specific course of independent study you contact the landscape architecture office landarch@design.upenn.edu or a professor you are interested in working with to begin discussing the possibility of your study.

Q: In every semester for the MLA program, students will be assigned the projects or students can choose different studio and focus on projects according to their interest?

A: For core studio, you are assigned projects but for elective studios, which come later in the program, you can choose those projects that you're interested in.

Q: How would you suggest I prepare for design on the computer for MLA between now and the start of term? You mention a review/introduction of digital skills being important for where design is today and I'm wondering how I could begin to cultivate some techniques early on.

A: Once you accept and set up your PennKey id you will have access to lynda.com (use this link https://www.isc.upenn.edu/lyndacom). This site offers tons of video tutorials on a variety of programs. It would be wise to check it out and use the practice files given. I am not too sure which programs landscape will use. I primarily know architecture programs such as Rhinoceros, Revit, AutoCad, Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign. These would be helpful to start with. Perhaps ArcGIS, I myself need to brush up on this program. During the summer classes I am sure the faculty will go over which programs will be the most relevant to landscape. I know they did a three week digital introduction for the architecture students just to acquaint them with the programs and facilities.

HOUSING
Q: Will information on accommodation application be sent out soon as well? Or should we engage with providers on our own asap?

A: You can check our admitted student website for housing information. After you accept our offer, in mid-April, we'll create a Facebook group for entering students so that you can network and share housing info.

Q: About moving to Philadelphia: If I make a temporary housing arrangement for July/August, will it be too hard to find a place to live by the end of august? I plan to search for a studio, since I`ll be moving to Philly with my spouse.

A: Housing availability can depend on where you're looking. If you intend to stick close to campus/ in University City it can be a challenge to find a lease starting in August, but definitely not impossible. The rest of the city is pretty flexible, there are a lot of options and it'll probably do you well to be in the city and looking rather than trying to arrange it remotely.

Q: Is there any way to find an apartment to live prior to arriving in Philadelphia? Is there some reliable websites or other platforms that can help us finding a place to live prior to arriving in Philadelphia?

A: Yes, it is possible to find apartment before arriving. The university has a web page with on- and off-campus housing offers: http://cms.business-services.upenn.edu/residential-services/.

Q: Would living in Sansom Place help with sleep since it's on campus and nearest to the library then?

A: While Sansom Place is close, there are a lot of other options that are very close to campus as well where you would get more for your money. Definitely take a look at the off-campus housing site: https://offcampushousing.upenn.edu/.

Q: Where do students usually go to find apartment outside the campus? Any reliable websites perhaps?

A: you can look at this web page: http://cms.business-services.upenn.edu/residential-services/. On and off campus housing are offered here. In particular you can look at this link for off campus: https://offcampushousing.upenn.edu/

Q: I require a PennKey to log in to access the off-campus site. What's my PennKey and where can I get it?

A: There should be an option to sign up as a guest without a PennKey to see the listings. See the GUESTS sign up section on this page: https://offcampushousing.upenn.edu/registration

FINANCIAL AID
Q: The transcript of previous web chat mentioned something about being qualified for work study. Exactly how does that work? How do I get qualified for work study?

A: Work-study is only available to US citizens or permanent residents. Most of our students find jobs in or around the school.

Q: So Work Study would apply to someone who lives in CA currently or does it have visa restrictions?

A: If you are a US citizen or permanent resident, you would be eligible for work-study. Are you on a F1 or J1 visa? If so, you wouldn't be eligible. But you could still get a student worker (non Federal work-study) position.

Q: How do I apply for student worker position? Do you mean this by working inside the university like at the library?

A: you can work in the library. We also have positions available in the computer lab and fabrication lab.

Q: May I ask how your PhD students are funded? Do they find funding or do you have funding usually available?

A: We offer a Fellowship that covers tuition, fees, health insurance, and a living stipend for 3 or 4 years, usually to about 3 new Ph.D. students a year in Architecture.

Q: Any tips on how to handle the tuition fees being an international student. Loans, etc.?

A: That's a tough question without knowing which country you are from. There are a couple international loans that we are aware of, but very few. Outside of loans, definitely take a look at our Outside Scholarships webpage for scholarship opportunities: https://www.design.upenn.edu/graduate-admissions/outside-scholarships.

Q: How about the GA position? I think it gives students housing, will you recommend it?

A: It's tough to do because by the time you get admitted, enrolled and register, many of the positions are taken. That said, if you get it, I don't think it would hurt your ability to perform well (you'll live on campus). I'd inquire about what the responsibilities are, but it seems fine. Also, keep in mind that you'd also likely be overseeing undergrads (yikes!) j/k :-)

Q: Do MUSA Grad get paid to oversee undergrads?

A: The GA oversees RA's who oversee the undergrads -- but you must live among them (ahhhhh!) j/k :-) And GA has nothing to do with MUSA (to clarify).

Q: I'd like to work about 15-20hours per week on campus. Do you think it is too much for a MUSA student?

A: I don't work on campus, but I have a number of startups that I consult with part-time.

Q: I have a PennDesign scholarship for fall and spring semester. Can this scholarship be extended to my last year of study as well?

A: If you are getting a PennDesign scholarship, you will receive it each semester of your program as long as you maintain full-time status and good academic standing.

Q: How can I apply for a TA position in the school? And I am curious about the income of a TA for every semester.

A: Usually, there are not TA positions available for AAD students during the first semester. However, I suggest you email Ali Rahim and ask him. Positions generally pay around $1500 to 2000 per semester depending on the Department.

OTHER TOPICS
Q: Do we need to stay a resident of Philadelphia after PhD comprehensive exam?

A: if you are finished with all of your coursework, and are on reduced tuition, you can leave Philadelphia as far as I know.

Q: Which projects are with three years of Optional Practical Training after graduation? Or longer time than one year. As I have the desire to have more practical experience after graduation and before my pursue on doctor degree, longer Optional Practical Training is good for me, so, I would like to know whether MCP will give me this chance.

A: I can't say, specifically, what projects there are with 3 years of Optional Practical Training, but I know that both MCP and MUSA are STEM programs and international students are able to find work.

Q: If I work at the University, does it take away my OPT visa period?

A: No that wouldn't affect OPT.

Q: My WES evaluation has not been completed yet. The organization says that my academic transcript is not accepted. Can I accept the offer and paid the fee beforehand? Since a new evaluation may not be finished within 15 days.

A: Yes, you can definitely still accept your offer and pay the deposit even if we haven't received your completed WES evaluation. But we will need the completed WES evaluation before fall courses start in August.

Q: I'm worried about that since WES sent me an email this morning that my academic transcript is not accepted by WES, So I think I have to send my English transcript to CDGDC again.

A: Please email us at admissions@design.upenn.edu and we are happy to look into it further with our WES representative before you re-request your official transcript.

Q: Having a Bachelor's degree in architecture from India, I would like to know how and if doing an NAAB accredited course or doing MSD-EBD (a non-NAAB accredited degree), would affect employment and licensing.

A: Our post-professional degrees are not accredited. It might affect employment but you can get your license by going through NCARB. Just takes longer.